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DEPT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE

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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Afghan Elections Situation Report Eight - 2100 Local,  
August 20, 2009

11. (SBU) The next sitrep is scheduled for 2400 local on August 20.

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Atmospherics  
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12. (U) President Karzai addressed the nation at 6pm August 20 to thank the IEC and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) for making the Afghan elections a reality, noting they had prevented several attacks. He thanked the Afghan people for voting, despite security threats from the Taliban. He said the MOI reported 73 security incidents in 15 provinces that caused civilian and ANSF casualties; however, these incidents did not stop Afghans from voting. He said Afghans have taken another step towards strengthening Afghan democracy. He finished by thanking the media-in particular the Afghan media-for reporting today. Contrary to an initial report, he did not say there had been "free and fair elections." The MOD, MOI, and NDS held a joint press conference around 7pm August 20 to highlight security successes, and report that the Afghans were "brave" and went to the polls.

13. (U) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah said in an interview with the press that he was pleased, overall, with the elections process. He added that he would be filing complaints with the Elections Complaint Commission (ECC).

14. (U) All polling stations have now closed. At this time, polling centers are counting votes, and starting to post tallies outside the polling station. Diplomats observed that in the north and the northeast, votes for the president seemed to overshadow votes for the provincial council. In the Kabul area, the German Ambassador saw many votes for the Presidential candidates, but noticed many voters chose not to vote for Provincial Council candidates.

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Voter Turnout  
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15. (SBU) At the UNAMA meeting with diplomats at 1900 local August 20, DSRSG Peter Galbraith said that according to impressionistic and anecdotal reports from UNAMA field offices, he would guess that turn-out was less than 50%, and specifically said that: for the west, turn-out was high, perhaps greater than in 2004; the north will also be higher than 2004; the northeast is low in Pashtun parts of Baghlan and Kunduz and good in Badakhshan; central is very low in Wardak and Logar; Kabul was not high compared with 2004; Panjshir very low, possibly as a result of reluctance to choose between Fahim and Abdullah; Paktiya very low except the Tajik community of Gardez; in the south, turnout was extremely low due to security considerations; in the east, Nangahar was not as good as hoped, but better than the south.

¶6. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

(U) Kabul: Embassy Mission Observers report that polling stations closed as scheduled, and the ballots were tallied according to established procedures. They reported that press was present in a few of the polling stations. Of the handful of polling stations that posted results in Kabul, either Abdullah or Karzai won with about equal frequency.

(U) RC South, RC North and RC East: No update since sitrep seven.

(U) Jalalabad reported a drop in voter turnout in the early afternoon in Jalalabad city. Voter turnout was also reported low in Khogyani District in the wake of the morning attack that killed the Deputy Police Chief there. There was also a report of low female voter turnout in Goshta District, reportedly caused by too many male election observers, which may have intimidated females. Insurgent intimidation also reportedly lowered voter turnout in southern Shirzad district, along the mountainous border with Pakistan.

(U) RC West: Herat reported voting to be moderate to heavy, with some polling booths still having long lines as of late afternoon. According to the press, some polling stations ran out of ballots, preventing "thousands" from voting.

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Security  
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¶7. (U) The German Ambassador met Interior Minister Atmar at a Kabul polling center this afternoon. The Minister was very satisfied with ANP performance, concluding the ANP has taken the right measures. He noted that only four ANP had been killed and eight wounded on

elections day, which is actually below average compared to a normal day in Afghanistan.

¶8. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

(U) RC South: Uruzgan reported that local security forces in Hussinea (within Khas Uruzgan district) were able to repel an early afternoon Taliban attack and the polling station was able to reopen.

(U) RC East: Nangarhar reports that District Governors from the volatile border districts near Pakistan reported generally good security due to the cooperation of tribal elders who have been providing additional security and urging high voter turnout. Khogyani District was the exception where the District Governor reported low voter turnout following the IED attack earlier in the day that killed the district's Deputy Police Chief. Police arrested a suspect who was carrying explosives and a trigger device. Insurgents carried out indirect fire attacks on polling stations in Nazyan, Achin, Shirzad Pachir and Wa Agam districts, but there were no casualties and polling stations remained open. A female suicide bomber in Jalalabad was arrested before she carried out her attack.

RC North and RC West: No update since sitrep seven.

(U) Herat reports that security is extremely tight in Herat city, with many roadblocks and checkpoints. ANP were at every major intersection and are even searching motorbikes before they can enter the city. The provincial ANP chief reported no major incidents in the province as of 1430.

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Voting & Counting Activities  
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¶9. (SBU) UNAMA preliminary and partial results suggest that President Karzai has done well in early Bamyan province tallies, Bashardost is second, and Abdullah is third. The Indian Ambassador had partial results from Kabul West that suggest Hazaras are voting more for Bashardost in that area.

¶10. (U) At 1615 Ambassador Eikenberry called in from Qala Wazir polling center in western Kabul to report that the center had run out of ballot papers and some 400 people had been waiting in line for over an hour. As he talked, word came that additional ballot papers had arrived.

¶11. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

(U) RC South: Uruzgan reported hearing from Governor Hamdam that

there were over 150 women voters waiting to vote in the northern part of Chora district, but the lack of a female election worker prevented them from voting. Gov. Hamdam immediately called Uruzgan IEC Chief Osmani to see what could be done to rectify the situation.

(U) RC East: Jalalabad noted that IEC officials reported no major logistical problems during the afternoon throughout Nangarhar Province, but said they were having problems at many voting centers using their hand-held hole punch devices to mark voter registration cards after voters cast their ballots. They have instead been using scissors to mark the cards.

(U) RC North: PRT Baghlan reported observing at two polling stations in the center of Pol-i-Kumri, where voters calmly made their way through the various steps, displaying savvy and understanding of the election process. The election staff appeared well trained and thorough. Security was not thought to present a problem and election workers expected a strong turnout. The only issue of significance reported was that some female voters were not able to read the ballot and, therefore, were experiencing difficulty identifying the candidates they wished to vote for.

(SBU) A European Embassy has heard unconfirmed reports of 2-12 Kunduz voters who had their finger cut off by the Taliban for voting.

(U) RC West: Herat reported that voting centers were open in 15 of 467 in Herat Province, with most of those not opening (11) in the Guzara district which is under the influence of local troublemaker Ghulam Yahya Siwashani (AKA Akbari); one center in Kohsan district near the Islam Qala border crossing did not open, and three centers in the Pashtun Zarghun district did not open. A big achievement was the opening of all polling centers in Shindand district, which has been one of the more problematic districts in the province in terms of security. State PRT Rep saw lots of observers at the polling centers, mostly from the candidates, but also EU observers. He noted that one observer identified himself as from the Secretariat of the Presidency in Kabul.

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Fraud  
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¶12. (SBU) The SRSR DSRSG Peter Galbraith described to diplomats a number of irregularities that he argued made little difference:

- Some said to have voted multiple times, having removed the "indelible" ink. Others, never inked.
- Some card punchers did not work.
- Election officials are said to have directed how to vote as did local strongmen.
- Reports also exist of larger scale rigging of votes in Kandahar.

The DSRSG maintained that we will get a clearer idea if this is true, and a large turn-out from parts of Kandahar would be suspect.

¶13. (SBU) Galbraith noted that he had seen candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah in the afternoon, and reminded him of the complaint process. Dr. Abdullah replied that he would use the Electoral Complaints Commission process.

¶14. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

(U) RC East: Jalalabad noted that IEC officials reported ongoing problems in Nangarhar Province throughout the afternoon with political election observers working for particular PC candidates. Nangarhar IEC Director Dr. Akhtar Ajmal reported that some of these observers - working on behalf of specific PC candidates - have been interfering in the work of IEC officials at election centers and demanding that some polling centers be shut down, while refusing to give specifics about their complaints. No centers have been closed.

IEC officials also reported that many election observers working for President Karzai and presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah have been very aggressive in urging people at polling stations to vote for their candidates.

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Public Affairs  
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In a press encounter the late afternoon of August 20, SRSR Kai Eide made the following points:

A) He noted grave concerns over security existed for the past few

days. Today had many incidents, but the situation was better than anticipated due to the comprehensive efforts of Afghan and international security forces.

B) The number of polling centers opened was 6200, that is the same as the number opened in the 2005 parliamentary elections. This is another achievement.

C) Turn-out obviously varied. Areas of conflict had lower turn-out than stable areas. That is unsurprising. We cannot say what the figures are as yet, but clearly, the turn-out demonstrates that people wanted the elections.

D) We have heard many stories about irregularities. There is no doubt that some took place. It is not something for me to comment on, but rather, for the action by the Electoral Complaints Commission.

E) All in all, this was a good day for Afghanistan. Today filled me with a feeling of respect for all the Afghans who organized and protected the elections, and for all those who went and cast their vote.

F) Afghanistan is now entering a new stage. I have a strong conviction and hope that the maturity demonstrated in the campaign period will be reflected in the post-polling period.

The British Deputy Ambassador noted that the UK Prime Minister may make a statement similar to that of the U.S. Embassy.

#### PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATES:

-A combined media briefing was held with IEC Chair Dr. Ludin, Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak, Minister of Interior Hanif Atmar, National Director of Security Amrullah Saheh.

-Dr. Lundin reportedly stayed on message and said the ANSF and ANP did a great job. He also said that Afghans showed they do not like "foreign, imperialistic powers" ruling over them and their voting today was proof of this.

-MOD's Wardak noted Afghans courageously participated with eight ANA killed and 25 injured. He reported 135 total incidents today, including five suicide attacks. MOI Minister Atmar also thanked Afghan security forces and the IEC. He added that despite threats, many Afghans voted but that nine ANP were killed and 14 injured. He added Afghans in 70 percent of the provinces voted without intimidation and in the remaining 30 percent, voters defied intimidation and voted courageously.

-NDS Minister Saheh thanked media for restraint, adding the media blackout requested was needed so that any incidents did not discourage Afghans from voting. He added that recent arrests of terrorists in Kabul led to information that prevented further attacks, especially in Herat, Kabul, Wardak, Ghazni, Takhar, Paktya

and Nangarhar.

-Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General of the UN Kai Eide

"The Secretary-General would like to congratulate the women and men of Afghanistan on today's Presidential and Provincial Council elections. He notes that, by exercising their Constitutional right to vote, the Afghan people have demonstrated again their desire for stability and development in their country.

The Secretary-General commends the Independent Election Commission, and all other Afghan institutions and international stakeholders supporting the electoral process for organizing the elections in an extremely challenging environment. He encourages all candidates, their agents and supporters to continue cooperating with all Afghan electoral institutions during the counting of ballots and the results aggregation period, the complaints and adjudication process and the certification of results."

#### Statistics:

-6,182 polling sites opened out of 6,519 (IEC)

-Significant incidents - 1,645 (estimated as of 6 p.m.)-ISAF joint operation

#### AFGHAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

-A local Kunar RTA affiliate delivered a positive "Get-Out-The Vote message in early afternoon. Call-in voters were positive.

-A local Kunar RTA affiliate reported Coalition Forces preempted the Anti-Afghan Forces from stopping voters in Naray and Chapadara districts and as a result voting resumed.

-A local Kunar RTA affiliate reported a mobile Taliban radio station in Sarkani District warned, "You will be punished if you vote.

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New Messaging  
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Embassy Kabul statement:

The American people congratulate the people of Afghanistan as this Election Day concludes, on the historic occasion of your nation leading, for the first time, democratic elections for President and Provincial Councils.

Along with others in the international community, we await the announcements of official results by the Independent Electoral Commission in the days ahead.

Washington talking points, as needed, if asked:

- Ambassador Holbrooke, Ambassador Eikenberry and many other Embassy observers were in the field today.
- We won't know the initial results of this nation-wide process until the Afghan Independent Election Commission releases official results several days from now.
- We're still assessing the levels of voter turnout, but obviously it is encouraging that the turnout was significant enough for the Afghan authorities to extend polling hours.
- The Afghan authorities have noted some technical irregularities and some allegations of fraud, which will be investigated by the Elections Complaints Commission.
- So far we haven't seen any incidences of major election-related violence in Kabul or other cities. Reports are still coming in, but right now it appears that Afghan National Security Forces capably handled the incidences that occurred.
- The Afghan people have shown courage and we commend them for exercising their right to express their views and choose their own leadership in the face of threats.

ISAF Messaging:

ISAF forces were engaged by insurgent forces today, including indirect and direct fire attacks against FOBs and patrols, as well as IED strikes against ISAF convoys, but these engagements were not election-related. Indeed, insurgent violence directed against election sites and events was quite capably handled by ANSF. ANSF did not request ISAF support in any election-related security events.

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ISAF TALKING POINTS  
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- Regarding security, the Afghan National Security Forces did a commendable job addressing all security issues they encountered today.
- Though violence was higher than normal, the Afghan National Security Forces effectively prevented insurgents from affecting Afghan voters' access to the polls.
- Today's security posture reflects the Afghan National Security Forces' successful planning and preparation efforts and demonstrates their professional capabilities and dedication to the future security of their nation.
- ANSF capably handled all insurgent violence directed against election sites and events; ANSF did not request ISAF support in any election-related security events.

EIKENBERRY